

6

Women and Politics

Highlights

- In 1974, Iowa women made up just 14 percent of those serving on state boards and commissions. In May 2001, that number reached 46 percent.
- In 2001, Iowa women comprised 22 percent of the state's General Assembly, up from 10.7 percent in 1977.
- In 2000, Iowa women made up 36 percent of all of the state's elected county officials.
- From 1990 to 2000, the number of women judges has increased in Iowa--from 6.0 percent to 17.8 percent of all judicial positions.
- The percentage of female registered voters who vote has dropped considerably since the 1984 general election, when 82 percent of female voters turned out at the polls. In 1996 and 2000, female voter turnout for the general election lagged at 72 percent.

—Chapter 6—

Women and Politics

6.1 Introduction

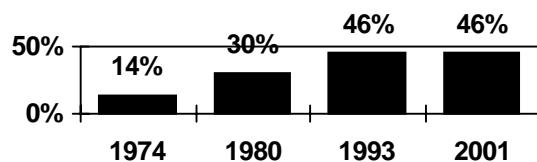
Women's involvement in all aspects of politics is crucial for the elevation of the status of women in Iowa and nationwide. Equal participation of women and men in politics will provide a necessary balance that more accurately reflects the composition of society. Although advances have been made in the number of Iowa women who hold public office or serve on state boards or commissions, they continue to be gravely underrepresented in the majority of the public decision-making bodies in the state.

6.2 State Boards and Commissions

The State of Iowa has made great strides over the past twenty-five years in attaining equal gender representation on boards and commissions. In 1974, only 14 percent of all people on state boards and commissions were women. Governor appointments steadily increased that percentage until 1987, when Iowa's gender balance law was enacted—the first of its kind in the nation. In May of 2001, 46 percent of members of Iowa's boards and commissions were female. (SEE FIGURES 6.1 and 6.2)

While Iowa has instituted gender balance on state boards and commissions, only one city in the state, Iowa City, has engendered such a policy.

Figure 6.1
PERCENTAGE OF FEMALES
ON STATE BOARDS AND
COMMISSIONS, IOWA, 1974-
2001



SOURCE: Office of the Governor

Figure 6.2
STATE BOARD AND COMMISSION
MEMBERS BY RACE/ETHNICITY, 2001*

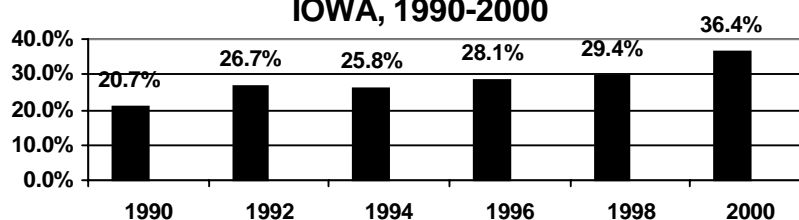
	# OF MALES	# OF FEMALES
White	543	505
African American	31	29
Asian American	2	4
American Indian	4	3
Hispanic	18	0
Unknown	19	18
Total	617	559

*As of May 21, 2001, 34 positions were open
SOURCE: Office of the Governor

6.3 State Department Directors

The number of women serving as state department directors has increased 15.4 percent from 1989 to 2000. Department directors are Governor-appointed positions. In 1989, six women served as leaders of state agencies. As of May 2000, nine women led state departments: Civil Rights, Cultural Affairs, Economic Development, Elder Affairs, Human Rights, Human Services, Management, Personnel and Public Safety. (SEE FIGURE 6.3)

Figure 6.3
FEMALE STATE DEPARTMENT DIRECTORS,
IOWA, 1990-2000



Source: Iowa Official Register

6.4 Elective Public Office

Iowa's record of electing women to public office, both at the state and national levels, is poor. It is one of only six states that has failed to send a woman to the U.S. Congress, and it ranks 29th nationwide in the number of women that serve in state legislatures.¹

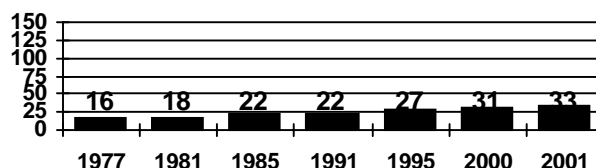
Since the first year in which a woman was elected to the Iowa General Assembly in 1929, the total percentage of women legislators has increased from .6 percent to 22 percent in 2001.

Even with this increase, women, who total 50.9 percent of Iowa's population, represent about one-fifth of the General Assembly. (SEE FIGURE 6.4) Eleven women serve as Senators, while 22 serve as Representatives in 2001. Representation of women of color in the General Assembly is also deficient; only two women of color have served in the Iowa General Assembly. Furthermore, few Iowa women have served as elected state officials. (SEE FIGURE 6.5)

Likewise, few women lead Iowa's cities. According to the Iowa League of Cities, of the 949 cities in Iowa, 101 women serve as mayors.

Iowa's record of electing women to county offices surpasses its record of electing women to state and national offices. In 1996, 34 percent of all county elected offices in Iowa were held by females. Since 1970, there has been a continual increase in the percentage of women elected as county officials in the state. (SEE FIGURE 6.6)

Figure 6.4
FEMALES IN THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY, IOWA, 1977-2001



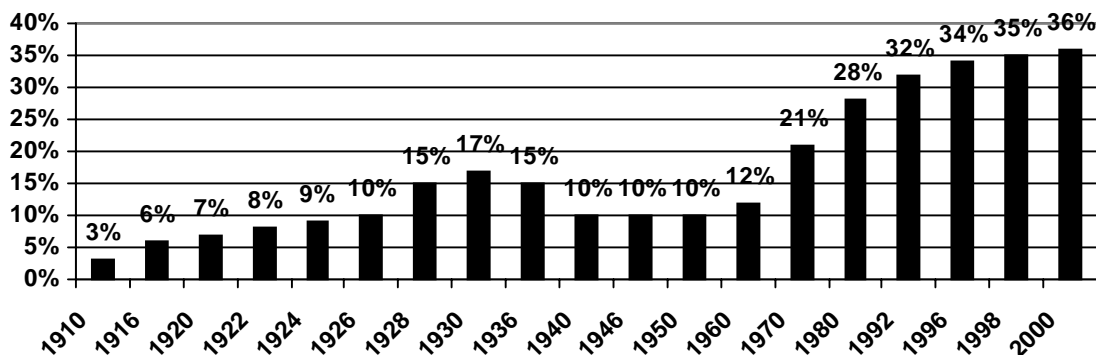
SOURCE: Suzanne O'Dea Schenken, *Legislators and Politicians: Iowa's Women Lawmakers*, 1995 and the Iowa Commission on the Status of Women, Iowa Department of Human Rights

Figure 6.5
FEMALE ELECTED OFFICIALS IOWA, THROUGH MAY OF 2001

OFFICE	# OF MALES	# OF FEMALES
Governor	39	0
Lieutenant Governor	41	3
Secretary of State	25	3
Treasurer	25	0
Auditor	30	0
Secretary of Agriculture	13	1
Attorney General	31	1

SOURCE: Iowa Official Register

Figure 6.6
PERCENTAGE OF FEMALES IN ALL ELECTED COUNTY OFFICES, IOWA, 1910-2000



Source: Melissa Fahr, Buena Vista University and Iowa Commission on the Status of Women, DHR

6.5 Judges

Although an increasing number of Iowa women have obtained law degrees over the past two decades, very few women serve as judges. Until recently, several types of judicial positions were held exclusively by men. That, however, is slowly beginning to change as Iowa is improving its representation of women on judicial seats.

According to the Iowa Judicial Branch, from 1990-2000 women magistrate judges increased from 7 to 28; associate juvenile judges from 2 to 6; district associate judges from 5 to 12; district court judges from 4 to 11; court of appeals from 1 to 3, and supreme court judges from 1 to 2. There were no female senior judges in 1990 or 2000. (SEE FIGURE 6.7)

In 2000, women comprised 17.8 percent of the state judiciary positions, compared to 6 percent ten years earlier.

Figure 6.7
FEMALE JUDGES, IOWA, 1990 AND 2000

<u>JUDICIAL SEATS</u>	<u>TOTAL JUDGES 1990</u>	<u>FEMALE JUDGES 1990</u>	<u>TOTAL JUDGES 2000</u>	<u>FEMALE JUDGES 2000</u>
Senior Judge	17	0	16	0
Judicial Magistrate	146	7	132	28
Associate Juvenile/Probate	10	2	13	6
District Associate	46	5	54	12
District Court	100	4	116	11
Court of Appeals	6	1	9	3
Supreme Court	9	1	8	2

SOURCE: State Court Administrator

6.6 Voters

In every presidential election since 1980, the proportion of eligible female adults who voted has exceeded the proportion of eligible male adults who voted. The number of female voters has exceeded the number of male voters in every presidential election since 1964.² The same holds true for Iowa.

In 2000, women comprised the majority of registered voters in the state at approximately 53 percent, men totaling 47 percent, the same as in 1996 and 1984. Since women make up 50.9 percent and men 49.1 percent of the population of the state, Iowa women have a higher voter registration rate than men.

Iowa females also have a higher voter turnout rate than men. In the 2000 and 1996 presidential election, voter turnout was 72 percent for females and 70 percent for males. Nonetheless, this was down from the 1984 presidential election when 82 percent of female registered voters and 81 percent of males voted. (SEE FIGURE 6.8) According to a survey by The Women's Vote Project,

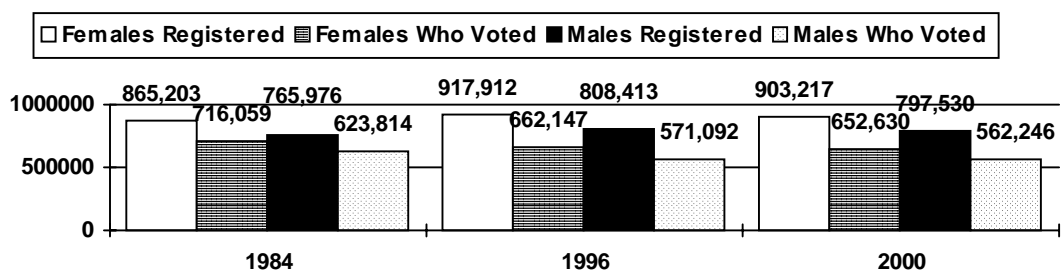
declining voter turnout for women can be attributed to several barriers, including getting time off work, finding child care, and lack of adequate information about candidates.³ The survey also found that white women were more likely than African-American or Hispanic women to receive information by mail or phone about election issues.⁴

Young adults, aged 18 to 24, had the lowest turnout rate for both men and women, with just 42 and 44 percent, respectively, of those registered to vote casting ballots. This is a substantial drop since 1984 when 63 percent of women and 62 percent of men in that age group voted in the general election. The largest turnout of female registered voters in 2000 was in the 50 to 64 age category at 84 percent. For males, those 65 years and older showed the largest voter turnout at 84 percent. (SEE FIGURE 6.9)

Since 1994, both men and women have been leaving the rolls of registered Democrats and Republicans to register as No Party (Independent). From 1984 to 2000,

there was an increase of 53 percent of women registered as Independents, while male affiliation increased by 50 percent. In fact, more people are registered as Independent than either Republican or Democrat. (SEE FIGURES 6.10 and 6.11)

Figure 6.8
VOTER PARTICIPATION, IOWA, 1984, 1996, AND 2000



SOURCE: Iowa Voter Registration

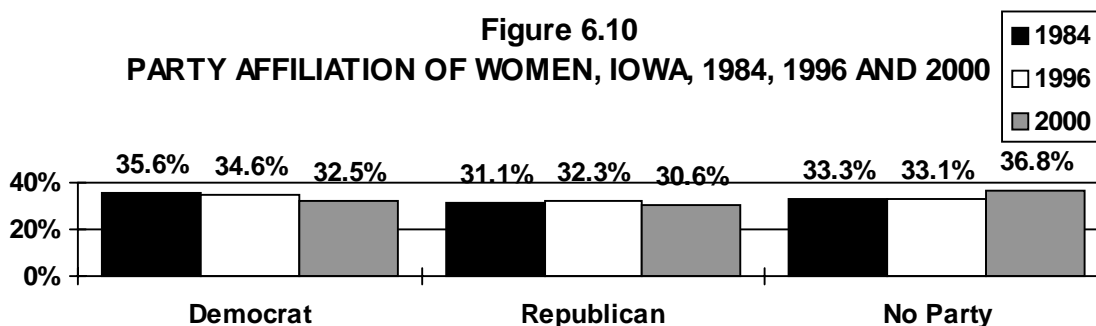
Figure 6.9
PERCENT OF REGISTERED VOTERS WHO VOTED BY GENDER, AGE, AND YEAR, IOWA, IN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS 1984, 1996, AND 2000

	AGE	18-24	25-34	35-49	50-64	65+	AGE UNKNOWN
FEMALE							
1984		63%	79%	87%	90%	85%	76%
1996		40%	56%	76%	84%	82%	18%
2000		44%	55%	75%	84%	81%	8%
Male							
1984		62%	76%	85%	89%	88%	49%
1996		38%	53%	74%	83%	85%	11%
2000		42%	52%	73%	83%	84%	0%

SEE TABLE 6.1 IN APPENDIX

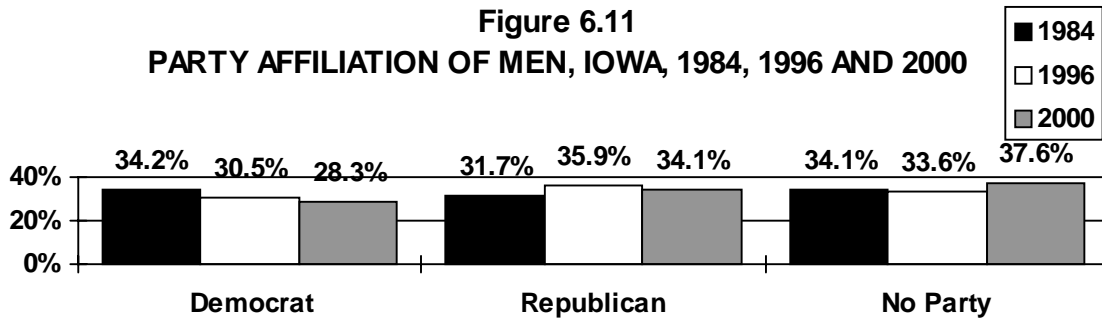
SOURCE: Iowa Voter Registration

Figure 6.10
PARTY AFFILIATION OF WOMEN, IOWA, 1984, 1996 AND 2000



SOURCE: Iowa Voter Registration

Figure 6.11
PARTY AFFILIATION OF MEN, IOWA, 1984, 1996 AND 2000



SEE TABLE 6.2 IN APPENDIX FOR 6.8 AND 6.9

SOURCE: Iowa Voter Registration

6.7 Forward-looking Strategies

■ It is crucial that women's active participation and incorporation at all levels of decision making, including that of city and county governments, be promoted by the establishment of measures that would substantially increase the number of women who serve on community decision-making bodies. This could include a legislative mandate for gender-balanced boards and commissions on city and county levels.

■ Women's service in state and national legislatures not only establishes a more representative governing body, but also works to advance the status of women in other ways. According to a national survey of women officeholders, women who hold elective office reshape the public policy agenda by giving a priority to women's rights policies and to women's traditional roles as caregivers in the family and society.⁵ Women elective office holders also serve as role models for other women. According to a groundbreaking study by the National Women's Political Caucus in 1994, women who run for elective office win as often as men do.⁶ Indeed, there are so few women in Iowa's elective offices because women just do not run. To encourage more women to run for office, work must be done to eliminate discriminatory attitudes and unequal gender power relations in private life that preface inequality in the public sphere.

■ Education of judicial nominating commission members regarding the need to increase the number of women in the Iowa judiciary should be continued. Furthermore, the judicial nominating commission members need to be encouraged to give weight and consideration to relevant background and experience in the selection of candidates, rather than favoring the time served in a law office.

■ Although the existence of a gender gap in voting has been debated since women won the right to vote in 1920, over the past two decades tangible political differences between women and men have increased.⁷ (The gender gap refers to differences between women and men in their political attitudes and voting choices.) For example, in 1996, the largest-ever recorded gender gap--11 points--was made during a presidential election, with women favoring Bill Clinton and men preferring Bob Dole.⁸

■ Voter education at an early age is an important factor in getting people out to the voting booths. Education on the history of women's struggle to obtain the right to vote in the U.S. should be increased in Iowa's schools.

■ Political parties and candidates must provide more equitable information by mail or phone to women of varying races and ethnicities.

¹Center for the American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University, *Women in State Legislatures*, 2001 Fact Sheet.

²Center for the American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University, *Sex Differences in Voter Turnout*, 1997.

³The Women's Vote Project, survey conducted by Lake, Sosin, Snell, Perry, and Associates, 1997.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Center for the American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University, *The Impact of Women in Public Office: An Overview*, 1991.

⁶National Women's Political Caucus, *Perception and Reality: A Study Comparing the Success of Men & Women Candidates*, 1994.

⁷Center for the American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University, *The Gender Gap*, 1997.

⁸Ibid

Chapter 6: Women and Politics

Table 6.1

REGISTERED VOTERS WHO VOTED BY GENDER, AGE, AND YEAR, IOWA, 1984, 1996 AND 2000

<u>Age</u>	<u>18-24</u>	<u>25-34</u>	<u>35-49</u>	<u>50-64</u>	<u>65+</u>	<u>Unknown</u>
Female 1984	73,333	146,267	178,620	157,363	160,625	211
Female 1996	41,882	86,434	207,793	148,865	177,167	6
Female 2000	47,548	78,190	196,209	159,415	171,265	3
Male 1984	67,338	132,162	164,980	142,006	117,284	44
Male 1996	37,368	75,407	190,657	136,226	131,432	2
Male 2000	42,186	67,946	177,119	148,146	126,849	0

Table 6.2

PARTY AFFILIATION BY GENDER, IOWA, 1984, 1996 AND 2000

	<u>Democrat</u>	<u>Republican</u>	<u>No Party</u>
Female 1984	259,574	235,575	220,910
Female 1996	317,152	296,681	304,079
Female 2000	293,929	276,823	332,465
Male 1984	217,829	209,953	196,032
Male 1996	185,631	232,434	153,027
Male 2000	225,679	272,088	299,763